

Richard Pipes

An Answer From 'Team B'

The writer was director of the task force that recently provided a controversial critique of the American intelligence community's estimate of Soviet intentions. He is professor of history and former director of the Russian Research Center at Harvard.

During the past week, The Post has prominently featured no fewer than four articles on what it terms "the flap over the latest intelligence estimates of the Soviet threat"—but what in fact is more accurately described as an exercise aimed at improving the process of drafting the government's annual National Intelligence Estimates.

These articles contain allegations concerning the motives and integrity of the so-called "Team B," whose assignment it was to provide an alternative assessment of the intelligence data on Soviet strategic objectives, and which I had the honor to chair. The allegations call for a response.

To begin with, it must be stated that since the information bearing on this matter is highly classified, all the judgments of outsiders rest on hearsay, i.e., unauthorized leaks. Such information is inevitably selective and distorted. It is certainly not sufficient evidence on which to base one's judgment of such grave and complex matters, let alone to pontificate, as The Post does in its editorial calling for "Good Intelligence."

The plain fact is that your writers have no idea how good or how bad our National Intelligence Estimates are, nor how Team B is proposing to improve them. Indeed, like all the other newspapers, The Post mistakingly assumes that the Team B report has become part of the official NIEs, whereas in fact it is an entirely separate document.

Your editorial refers to our panel as a

"kangaroo court," which signifies a court set up in violation of established legal procedures as well as one characterized by dishonesty and incompetence. Those are strong words.

The fact of the matter, however, is that Team B was created to function as a body of expert advisers, not as a panel of judges. It was established and staffed by the Director of Central Intelligence; it was furnished by him with data; it was financed by him; its final report was submitted to him for consideration.

The Director of Central Intelligence, George Bush, thus constituted the ultimate authority for both Team A, composed of the regular compilers of the National Intelligence Estimates, and Team B, its alternative.

So much for the procedural aspect. I will not bother to defend the panels' honesty, but as regards competence I cannot refrain from noting that, according to your correspondent, Team B owed much of its impact to the "prestigious names and reputations" of its members. You cannot have it both ways: imply we are incompetent and at the same time blame us for allegedly overwhelming CIA analysts with the weight of our prestige and reputation.

Joseph Kraft in his column perceives behind the whole affair an emergent political realignment. Turning from zoological to Biblical terminology, he sees it as pitting "the righteous"—persons particularly worried about Soviet expansion—against the "repenters," whose primary motive is guilt over Vietnam. The righteous, he says, prefer to work "through channels," as typified by the manner in which they allegedly "bent" the CIA estimates of the Soviet threat. However (still according to his interpretation) alarmed by Jimmy Carter's preference for the "repenters,"

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"the righteous" have defied it to carry their message to the public.

I do not know where, when, and by whom this decision was taken, nor why I had been left out of it. For as far as I am concerned my efforts at publicity so far have consisted of refusing to appear on the national CBS and ABC networks, as well as two local Boston TV stations, and declining an invitation to take part in a conference on this subject projected in Washington, D.C., for inauguration week.

I have done so because I feel that "carrying the message to the public" would politicize the issue and thereby pervert and perhaps even undo the pos-

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sitive work that I believe Team B has accomplished. I know that several other members of Team B feel likewise and also have refused opportunities to appear before the media.

If, however, leaks are meant, then I do not know on what evidence Kraft implies that their source has been Team B. Team B's report has by now been read by quite a few Washington officials, any one of whom may have taken it upon himself to leak the story, either because he sympathizes with the panel's views and wants to publicize them or because he disagrees with them and wishes to discredit them.

Which brings me to the heart of the matter, the issue of politicization. The problems facing modern government are growing more numerous as well as complex, and raise questions on which honest and competent people can honestly as well as competently disagree. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of the National Intelligence Estimates,

on whose valid assessments of the intentions and capabilities of potential enemies depends a great deal of national security.

Some people seem unable to conceive that such disagreements as have divided Team B from Team A may have been genuine. Instead, they choose to see behind Team B sinister forces bulldozing the CIA, "blackmailing" the Carter administration (Kraft's words) and inciting the public. Similarly, quite without foundation The Post assumes that the CIA analysts responsible this year for the NIEs did not exercise their own judgment but simply caved in to alleged political pressures.

The merits of the case—in other words, the reality of Russian capabilities and intentions—are seemingly considered by your writers as of marginal importance. The matter that concerns them is the putative motives of the people involved with this experiment and its political implications. This is a particular form of nastiness that poses as worldly sophistication but in reality conceals an utter inability to look at things in a detached manner.

Incidentally, I dare suggest that if a similar panel set up by the Secretary of Defense had concluded that the U.S. military budget was grossly swollen, you would not have sprung to the defense of the poor, battered Pentagon analysts. Which perhaps tells something about your biases, which, like most people prone to question the motives of others, The Post would prefer not to analyze in itself.

What is the future of the country if prestigious papers like The Post can no longer conceive that issues do have merit and therefore can be rationally argued among honorable men, preferring to leap into the fray with *ad hominem* arguments?

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